

Hodgkinson. 112.

AN
ANSWER
TO THE
QUESTION,

"Whether it appears from the Writings of the Apostles that they believed
the Day of Judgment to be at hand?"

THE RESULT OF AN EXAMINATION
INTO
SEVERAL PARTS
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT
AND THE
APOCALYPSE OF ST. JOHN.

BY THE REV. JOSEPH HODGKINSON, M. A.

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CHESTER,
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1799.

ANSWER
TO THE
QUESTION,

Whether a report from the Whigs of the Apocrypha will be received
the House of Commons to be received.

THE RESULT OF AN EXAMINATION



NEW TESTAMENT

AND THE

APOCALYPSE OF ST. JOHN.

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CHESTER.

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AND G. SELL, LONDON.

1793.

TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
WILLIAM
LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER,
PRINCIPAL OF BRAZEN-NOSE COLLEGE,
THE FOLLOWING TRACT,
UNDERTAKEN BY HIS LORDSHIP'S DIRECTION,
AND PUBLISHED AT HIS REQUEST,
IS, WITH SENTIMENTS OF PROFOUND RESPECT AND VENERATION,
HUMBLY DEDICATED,
BY HIS LORDSHIP'S MOST OBLIGED AND MOST DEVOTED SERVANT,
JOSEPH HODGKINSON.

THORNTON, CHESHIRE,
FEB. 11, 1799.

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM

LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER



UNDERSTAKEN BY HIS LORDSHIP'S DIRECTOR

AND RETURNED AT HIS REQUEST

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

HUMBLY DEDICATED

BY THE DIRECTOR'S MOST OBLIGING AND MOST DEVOTED SERVANT

JOSEPH HODGKINSON

THOMSON, LONDON

MAY 11 1850

PREFACE.

IT has been justly observed by an able* advocate for the religion of Christ, that, in searching after truth, there are two things in our power—"the use of our faculties, and the due and impartial use of them." In the investigation, indeed, of any subject, however trifling or unimportant in its consequences, these faculties, if the conviction of mankind be the end of our research, must be exerted with impartiality ; but when any part of Scripture is made the object of our criticism, the rule becomes indispensable, as the opinions we may form may not only affect our happiness here, but our salvation hereafter. In the following Tract, an Answer to the Question, "Whether it appear from the writings of the Apostles, that they believed the day of judgment to be at hand ;"—a question proposed to the Author as Probationary Fellow of Brazen-nose College,

* Bishop Gibson.

College, this rule of impartiality has been carefully observed. The passages in the New Testament, which have been generally adduced as giving a sanction to this notion, have been accurately stated ; and the interpretations of the earlier Commentators upon such passages have been fairly examined. From this examination a conclusion has been drawn directly contrary to the opinion of a late *writer, which hence appears to be founded neither in truth nor impartiality. From the silence of the earlier Christians too an argument has been drawn, which, it is trusted, will, with every candid enquirer, have its due weight in disproving the assertion of this writer, that the Apostles did expect the day of judgment to be at hand—an assertion, which strikes at the truth of the inspiration of the Apostles, and which, if not refuted, must bring even their prudence as men into discredit.

* Gibbon.

AN ANSWER, &c.

THE Author of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, in his attempts to account for the rapid progress of Christianity, says, that * “the influence of truth was very powerfully strengthened by an opinion, which, however it may deserve respect for its usefulness and antiquity, has not been found agreeable to experience. It was universally believed, that the end of the world, and the † kingdom of Heaven were at hand.” In a note subjoined the reader is referred to the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and to the first epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians; and by these passages he is told he will find the expectation countenanced. As the arguments in favour of Mr. Gibbon’s assertion have been, by himself and others, principally collected from the writings of St. Paul, it will, perhaps, be more methodical, as well as more illustrative of our subject, to di-

* Gibbon’s Hist. Vol. xi, page 300, 8vo.

† I shall not here contend with this author about his sense of “the kingdom of Heaven,” which, in its more usual acceptation in the Gospels, was certainly then at hand, because he must be supposed to use it in the sense of God’s future kingdom in Heaven.

rect our consideration to the first of these, in which, as well as in the other epistles, it will be found clear, that the Apostles did not believe the end of the world, or the day of judgment, to be at hand.

“ * The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

That the meaning of the Apostle was, indeed, misunderstood by some Christians, whose grief, at the decease of their friends and relations, was aggravated by the expectation of Christ's second and immediate coming, is too evident to admit of much doubt.† They had entertained strange and erroneous notions of rank and precedency, by which those, who should be found alive, when the sound of the last trump should summon the world to judgment, were to be then distinguished from those who had been asleep. St. Paul, however, kindly alleviates their sorrow, by assuring them that their deceased friends had not by death forfeited their claim to any eminence, to which the living should be then entitled. “ We which

* I. Thess. c. iv, v. 16, 17.

† See Benson in loc:

“ are

“ are alive and remain,” says he, “ unto the
 “ coming of the Lord shall not prevent them that
 “ are asleep—for the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

But the question has been asked, why the Apostle spoke in the plural number, “ we who remain,” unless with the intention of including himself amongst those, who should be alive at our Saviour’s second advent? To this question, however, the reply is easy and obvious. In the best writers plural expressions in the first person frequently occur, where it is evident, either from the context, or from the nature of things, that the author had no design of speaking personally of himself, or particularly of the people to whom he addressed his discourses. And, if the Old and New Testament be brought under review, instances will crowd upon the reader, which will prove this mode of expression to have been prevalent both with the Jews and with the Apostles.*

When the generation that came out of Egypt were in general dead, Moses thus addresses their children :† “ The Lord our God spake unto us in “ Horeb ;” and again, when they should be settled in the land of Canaan, he instructed them that they should then say, “ ‡ the Egyptians evil en-

* See Bp. Horne’s Letters on Infidelity, page 284.

† Deut. ch. i, v. 6.

‡ Deut. ch. xxvi, v. 6.

“treated *us*, and afflicted *us*, and laid upon *us* hard bondage.” St. Matthew, in his gospel, says, our Saviour answered the question, * “why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorce-ment?” by these words, “Moses because of the hardness of *your* hearts suffered *you* to put away *your* wives.” And in St. John, the Jews who were living during the ministry of our Saviour, were asked, † “did not Moses give *you* the law?” Numberless other instances to the same effect might be produced; nor can any reason be alledged, why St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, when speaking of the Christians of different ages, should not have adopted the same phraseology, as had been used before to the Jews of different ages. ‡

In commenting upon the words “*nos viventes*,” an author, § of considerable ability and erudition, however on some accounts objectionable, has thus explained the meaning of the passage: “*Qui-
cunque vixerint usque ad adventum Domini,
sive ego, sive vos, sive quicumque tandem futuri
sunt, quibus viventibus adveniet Dominus Jesus.
Neque enim in primâ personâ ideo hæc effert,
quod persuasus omnino sit, aut se, aut illos*

* St. Mat. ch. xix, v. 8.

† St. John, ch. vii, v. 19.

‡ Benson's Comment.

§ Crellius, v. 1, page 570.

“Thessalonicenses,

“ Theſſalonicenſes, ad adventum uſque Chriſti
 “ viſturos, ſed cum utrique tunc temporis adhuc
 “ viverent, ſe quoque illi hominum generi accen-
 “ ſent, quos in adventu ſuo deprehendet Chriſtus :
 “ ſeu ut clariùs rem exprimamus, vocibus illis
 “ nos viventes non ſpeciem aut individua hæc,
 “ hoc eſt ſeipſum et Theſſalonicenſes, alioſque
 “ Chriſtianos eo ipſo, quo hæc ſcribebat, tempore
 “ viventes intelligit, ſed genus, ſeu homines ejus-
 “ dem generis, hoc eſt, Chriſtianos viventes, a
 “ quorum numero, ipſe unà cum Theſſalonicen-
 “ ſibus tunc temporis erat. Solet enim Sacra
 “ Scriptura non ſemel vocibus, nos, vos, ac ſemi-
 “ libus, non quidem illa ipſa individua quæ di-
 “ cuntur, aut ad quæ ſermo eſt, denotare, ſed
 “ idem individuorum genus, ſeu ejusdem generis
 “ ſingularia.”*

If, moreover, we conſider that Chriſtians are
 members of one church, St. Paul's expreſſion
 muſt appear not only juſtifiable, but as pleaſingly
 deſcriptive of that love and affection, which ſhould
 ever ſubſiſt amongſt his Chriſtian Brethren. Una-

* Eſtius gives the ſame meaning to the paſſage. Nos qui
 vivimus, qui reſidui ſumus, et cætera: non velut dubius aut
 incertus, ut nonnulli ſuſpicati ſunt, an fortè ſe vivo futurus eſſet
 Domini adventus: nam hujusmodi opinionem instantis diei Do-
 mini natam ex ſuis verbis diſertè in ſecundà epiſtolà rejicit, docens
 quænam et quanta ſint, quæ illum diem adhuc præcedere de-
 beant. Eſt. Comm. page 729.

nimity and mutual attachment were always inculcated by the Apostle upon his converts; and this passage seems to be prophetic of the continuation and completion of these virtues in Heaven. "The dead in Christ," says the Apostle, "shall rise first," then, an interval scarcely admitted, "we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord," our happiness completed, and our joy made perfect.

"The near approach of this wonderful event," the end of the world, says Mr. Gibbon again, "had been predicted by the Apostles." But the passage, to which, for confirmation of what is asserted, his readers are referred, does not certainly *countenance* the expectation. The Historian argues and asserts that it does; but as proof is not the result of his argument, conviction cannot be the result of his assertion.

In the note above mentioned the same author asserts, that "the learned Grotius ventures to insinuate, that, for wise purposes, the pious deception was permitted to take place." Grotius indeed, after having said that the love of fame could not have induced the Apostles, men distinguished by their sincerity, and whose tenets were repugnant to every suggestion of pride and ambition, to undergo the hardships to which they were exposed, proceeds thus in confirmation of his

his argument, * “ accedat, quod etiam hanc
 “ qualemcumque famam nullo modo durabilem sibi
 “ poterant promittere, cum, Deo de industriâ
 “ suum in hoc consilium cælante, mundi totius exi-
 “ tium, quasi de proximo imminens opperirentur,
 “ quod et ipsorum et sequentium Christianorum
 “ scripta apertissimum faciunt.” Grotius, indeed,
 proves himself, in this passage, to have laboured
 under a mistake; but the interpreter of his mean-
 ing seems desirous of fastening upon his character
 an imputation which is by no means merited.†

In explaining the words, *πᾶσι τοῖς ζῶντες, οἱ περιληπόμενοι*, Grotius gives to them this signifi-
 cation: “ nos, inquit Paulus, quia putabat fieri
 “ *posse*, ut inter superstites esset.” Thus it is cer-
 tainly here said by him, that the Apostle believed
 he might possibly live to the day of judgment:
 but then this exposition cannot easily be recon-
 ciled with that of the passage in the second epistle
 to Timothy, *ο κειρος της εμης αναλυσεως εφεςηκε*, for,
 says our Commentator, “ dixit hoc Paulus, non

* Grotius de veritate Christianæ Religionis. Lib. 2do. p. 76.

† The character of Grotius, as delineated by the pen of the
 venerable Bishop of Worcester, must challenge the admiration
 both of the Christian and scholar. Even his errors are repre-
 sented as taking their rise from the purest motives; and his mo-
 ral qualities are such, that he cannot easily be supposed guilty
 of the insinuation of which the Historian seems desirous of con-
 victing him. Bp. Hurd on the Prophecies, p. 267.

“ tantum

“ tantum quia omnia quæ videbat Romæ, et in
 “ Aulâ Neronis, id credi jubebant; verum insu-
 “ per ut arbitror, a Deo de eo quod futurum erat
 “ edoctus.”* How then could the Apostle, being,
 by divine revelation convinced of his own impend-
 ing dissolution, expect to live 'till the day of
 judgment? It cannot well be said that this con-
 viction of the Apostle was the consequence of in-
 formation received from God after his first epistle
 had been written to the Thessalonians, for in the
 same year he wrote his second epistle to the same
 Christians; in which he says, “ We beseech you,
 “ brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ, and by our gathering together unto
 “ him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or
 “ be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word,
 “ nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of
 “ Christ is at hand.” Thus, if by the coming
 of our Lord Jesus Christ be understood the day
 of judgment, it is evident either that the Thessa-
 lonians had misconceived the meaning of the
 Apostle's first letter, or had been imposed upon

* Philippians, ii. 17, Grotius has the following comment upon
 the words, “ ἀλλ' ἐκαι πεινδομαί, videbat facile fieri posse
 “ ut ipso suo sanguine fidem et Philippenſium et aliorum con-
 “ firmaret.”

Philipp. i. 20, is thus explained by Rosenmuller, “ si morien-
 “ dum fuerit pro Christo, morte mea veritas doctrinæ Christi
 “ confirmabitur.”

by

by the forgeries of others, and that the second, which was written a short time after the first, was intended to convince them of their error, and proved incontestably that the author himself entertained no expectation of an immediate judgment.*

“The tradition,” proceeds the Historian of the wonderful event before mentioned, “was preserved by their earliest disciples.” But this surely was not the case: for, if the earliest disciples believed that the Apostle had expected to have lived ’till the end of the world, they must have been convinced, after his death, that he had been mistaken, and, being so convinced, must necessarily have called into question his inspiration. For St. Paul prefaces the passage above quoted from the first epistle to the Thessalonians with these words, “this we say unto you by the word of the Lord,” and then he proceeds “we which are alive and remain,” &c. But if we consult St. Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, we shall find that he had not received any such tradition from the earlier disciples, nor had entertained any such opinion himself. His explanation of the passage proves directly the contrary: “το δε ημεις,” says he, “επει εαυτε φησι

* The events, which were to take place before the general judgment, are mentioned at large by Mede—page 665.

“ (ε γαρ

“ (* γὰρ ὅτι ἐμελλεν αὐτός μεχρὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως μένειν)
 “ ἀλλὰ τῆς πίστες λέγει : ” nor does St. Athanasius
 give any such exposition of the words as can in
 the least degree be supposed to countenance Mr.
 Gibbon’s assertion. Ζῶντες εἰσι οἱ εὐρισκομένοι τότε ἐν
 “ τῇ ἀνάστασι καὶ γὰρ εὐρηθησούναι ἀνθρώποι ἐν τῇ ἡμίρᾳ
 “ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἐκ οὐθύναι θάνατον, πλὴν καὶ μὴ φθασῶσι
 “ τῆς κοιμηθείας. ” * Theodoret tells his readers,
 “ ὥσπερ αὐτός ο δεσποτὴς ἐπὶ νεφέλης φώτειν ἀνελθὼν,
 “ ἔτω καὶ οἱ ἐς αὐτὸν πεπιστευκότες οἷε ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνίστα-
 “ μένοι, καὶ οἱ ἐτι περιούτες, ἐπὶ νεφελῶν σχημαθόντες ὑπ-
 “ αἰνήσαντι τῷ τῶν ὁλῶν κρίσει, καὶ συν αὐτῷ διαγούσιν τὸν
 “ ἀπεραντὸν αἰῶνα διαλείεσθαι. ” And Theophylact
 adopts the same explanation : “ Ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ ζῶντες,
 “ λέγων, καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ φησὶ (ἔδε γὰρ ἀχρι τῆς ἀναστάσεως
 “ ἐμελλε ζῆν) ἀλλὰ τῆς πίστες λέγει. ”

From this evidence it not only does not appear
 to have been a tradition preserved by the earliest
 disciples, that the day of judgment was supposed,
 in their time, to have been at hand, but the pas-
 sages above quoted prove the very contrary.—
 Now had there been a tradition fraught with such
 mighty importance to the Christian cause, it would
 certainly have reached the fourth century. For,
 though accurate investigation might have corrected
 the error, yet some vestiges of it would certainly
 have been preserved.

* Athan. edit. Par. vol. ii, p. 430.

There occurs another passage in the first epistle to the Corinthians, misinterpreted by Grotius in the same manner, in which he has misrepresented the meaning of the words before quoted. "Now
 " this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot
 " inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth
 " corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I shew
 " you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we
 " shall all be changed, in a moment, in the
 " twinkling of an eye at the last trump, for the
 " trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised
 " incorruptible, and we shall be changed:" καί

ἡμεῖς ἀλλαγησόμεθα, nempe quos vivos Deus illic deprehenderit, says Grotius, inter quos Paulus putavit fieri *posse* ut et ipse esset, et alii multi qui cum ipso vivebant. But this certainly was not the meaning of the Apostle; nor can it from hence be proved that he entertained any expectation of being amongst those who should not sleep.—In the second epistle to the Corinthians he says expressly, " I know that he which raised up the
 " Lord Jesus, shall raise up *us* also by Jesus, and
 " shall present *us* with you." The exposition of Grotius, therefore, is not agreeable to the sense of the passage, nor to the general meaning of St. Paul upon the subject; and if we apply to the earlier commentators, we shall find, that it was not founded upon their opinion. Theodoret says that the Apostle did not in this passage, by the

plural expression, mean to include himself in the number of those, who should survive till the second coming of the Lord; but that he spoke only of those, who should be alive at the time, however distant it might be, when the general judgment should take place: *ἡμεῖς ἔτι περιεσθίοντες ἐσμέν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν καὶ ἐκεῖνον τὸν καιρὸν ἐτι περιούτων ἀνθρώπων.**

“ We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be

* Οὐ πάντες μὲν, φησὶν, ἀποθανεῖν, ὁμοῦ μὲντοι πάντες ἀλλαγῶμεθα, καὶ οἱ μὴ ἀποθνήσκοντες, τῆς αἰῶνος ἀφθαρσίας μετασχηματίζονται. Μὴ τοίνυν ἐπειδὴν ἀποθνήσκεις φοβηθῇς ὅτι ἔτι ἀναστήσῃ· ἰδὲ γὰρ λέγω σοι, ὅτι τινες ἔτι τεθνήσκουσιν, καὶ ὁμοῦ ἔτι ἀρκεῖ αὐτοῖς τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἐκείνην, εἰ μὴ ἀλλάγῃ, καὶ ἕως εἰς ἀθανάσιον ἐλθῶσιν ἀπὸ τῆς θνητότητος ταύτης ὧν ἔχουσιν ὤματα. Ὡς περὶ ἡμεῖς βλάψῃ το ἀποθάνειν· καὶ γὰρ κακίους ἢ ἀλλοτρίου θανάτου ἐσμέν.

Theophylact, I Cor. xv. 51.

Ὁ δὲ λέγει τὸ ἐπὶ πάντες μὲν ἀποθανεῖμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγῶμεθα, καὶ οἱ μὴ ἀποθνήσκοντες· θνητοὶ γὰρ κακίους. μὴ τοίνυν, ἐπειδὴν ἀποθνήσκεις, διὰ τὸ δεισῇς, φησὶν, ὡς ἔτι ἀναστήσομαι· εἰσι γὰρ τινες, εἰσιν, οἱ καὶ τὸ διαφθεῖναι. καὶ ὁμοῦ ἔτι ἀρκεῖ αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἐκείνην, ἀλλὰ δεῖ καὶ ἐκεῖνα τὰ σώματα μὴ ἀποθνήσκοντα ἀλλάγῃ, καὶ εἰς ἀφθαρσίαν μετασχηματίζονται.

Chrysostom, I Cor. xv. 51.

“ changed :”

“ changed : ” It seems somewhat unreasonable from the former clause to draw this conclusion, that there were some amongst those, to whom the Apostle then addressed himself, who should not sleep ; for it is evident that he did not mean to particularize any such among the then living, who should survive ’till the last day, but that he made use of the expression merely to introduce the latter general clause, “ we shall all be changed . ” It seems, indeed, to have been the only design of this passage to demonstrate the necessity of a general change both of quick and dead, and not to particularize those who should constitute either the one or the other : for, says he, “ flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; we must, therefore all be changed ; this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality . ” These mistakes, however, of Grotius cannot justify Mr. Gibbon’s assertion, that any deception was practised upon the Apostles, or by them upon others. The earlier disciples of our Blessed Lord were neither themselves the dupes of any deception, nor were they capable of practising “ pious frauds ” upon their converts : their purity and integrity are unimpeachable ; their only study was how to promote true religion ; their only wish was to gain the approbation of their God.

Reduced to a dilemma, and refuted, ’till their

exhausted ingenuity has been no longer able to frame more plausible objections, some have dared to insinuate that the Apostles invented this story of the near approach of the day of judgment, that their converts might be the more easily despoiled of their wealth and their possessions. But, had they acted in this manner, they would not have done so in pursuance of the advice of their Divine Master, which was given to them in language so pathetically beautiful—" Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom: sell that ye have, and give alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." In the subsequent ages of the Church, indeed, by this artifice and this apprehension, convents were enriched and religious communities endowed, but the Apostles themselves were surely as exempt from the charge of self-interest, as they were unaccustomed to scenes of luxury and affluence; " even unto this present hour," says St. Paul, " we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our hands: being reviled we bless; being persecuted we suffer it; being despised we entreat; we are made as the filth of

" the

“ the earth; and are the off-scouring of all things
 “ unto this day.” Their immediate successors
 too were distinguished from the rest of mankind,
 not by the splendor of vanity and the superfluity
 of wealth, but by the extensiveness of their cha-
 rity, and the uniform purity of their conduct.—
 Their possessions were renounced, not as “ the sa-
 “ crifices of sensuality at the shrine of pride,”
 nor as a deposit which might produce some future
 indulgence, but from the purest motives and with
 the sublimest views. In the tenth century, when
 corruptions disgraced the Latin Church, the sin-
 cerity and charity of the first disciples were super-
 ceded in the Christians of that age, by an hypo-
 critical austerity and a supercilious pride. Amongst
 the various agitations to which the Church was,
 at this time, subject, it is indeed true, that none
 occasioned so much terror and dismay, as the no-
 tion, which then prevailed, of the immediate ap-
 proach of the day of judgment.* The possessions
 of the rich were poured, without reserve, into the
 coffers of the monastery, and the greatest part of
 mankind became enslaved to the corrupt ministers
 of the Church. But these agitations, whether
 the effect of error or of artifice, cannot reflect
 the least degree of criminality upon the first
 founders of Christianity, nor upon Christianity

* Gregory's Church Hist. Vol. II. Century 10th.

itself. The purity of the Gospel, and the uniform sincerity of its first teachers, prove that design or artifice was, in the first ages of the Church, totally impracticable; and to expect that such sincerity should continue, through revolving years, unallayed by imperfections, would be to expect such a consistency, as is incompatible with the frailty of human nature.

Nor can it be proved, that in the first century, the general resurrection was expected to take place, if we consult the writings of still earlier Christians than those from whom we have before quoted. St. Chrysostom, in language forcible and descriptive, presents his readers with a comparison drawn betwixt the peaceable times in which he lived himself, and the more disastrous age, in which the Apostles and their immediate successors had lived before. *Νυν μὲν γὰρ, says he, τῇ τε θεῇ χαρίδι κινδυνὸς ὁδεῖς τοῖς ἐπισκοποῖς, ἀλλ' εἰρήνῃ πάντα χόθεν βαθεῖα, καὶ γαλήνῃς ἀπολαύομεν ἅπαντες, τῇ λογῇ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἐκείσμεν πρὸς τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς οἰκουμενῆς, καὶ τῶν βασιλευσίων ἡμῖν τὴν πίσιν συντερνίσαν μὲν ἀκριβείας.* Τότε δὲ, drawing the contrast by representing the very different scene in which the earlier disciples had been the principal actors, *ὁδὸν τῶν ἡν ἀλλ' ὅτε- περ ἂν τις εἶδε, κρημνοὶ, καὶ βαράθρα, καὶ πολέμοι, καὶ μάχαι, καὶ κινδύνοι, καὶ ἀρχόντες, καὶ βασιλεῖς, καὶ δῆμοι, καὶ πόλεις, καὶ ἔθνη, καὶ οἰκεῖοι, καὶ ἀλλόθριοι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπεβλήον.* Had the constancy and
perseverance

perseverance of the Apostles been the consequence of an immediate expectation of that crown of glory, which was to be given them at the last day, the pleasing prospect would, probably, have been mentioned, in this passage, as having been their consolation in the midst of affliction, and the hope which animated their piety and resignation. But there is not this mention made of any such expectation; nor in the passage which relates the martyrdom of St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Ignatius, is any intimation found of the prevalence of such opinion: Πέτρος και Παυλος, και μετ' εκεινους * ελος † εκει παντες εθυθησαν· τειο μεν, ινα μολυνθεισαν την πολιν τοις των εδωλων αιμασι· τοις οικειοις αιμασι εκκαθαρωσι, τειο δε, ινα της αναστασεως τε σαυρωθεντος Χριστε δια των εργων παραχωνται την αποδειξιν. Ignatius, when told of the public manner in which the cruelty of the spectators was to be gratified by his death, did not express any disappointment, which, had he expected to have survived till the second coming of the Lord from Heaven to judge the world, might have been occasioned by the impending danger, but, with pious resignation, told his informers, that such a death would be his pleasure, Εγω των θηριων εκεινων ουαιμην.

Here then is no despondency mentioned arising

* Ignatius.

† Rome.

from disappointed hopes and frustrated expectations; but a collected courage, and a calm intrepidity, which enabled him to meet his fate, as what had been the object of his wishes, and as what would be the consummation of his happiness. The more ignominious their death, the more noble, the Apostles were assured, would be the display of their zeal, and the enhancement of their glory.

St. Ignatius himself, in his epistle to the Romans, has these words: Ουχ' ως Πίερος και Παυλος διατασσομαι υμιν· εκεινοι αποστολοι, εγω καλακριτος· εκεινοι ελευθεροι, εγω δε μεχρι νυν δαλος. Αλλ' εαν παθω, απελευθερος Ιηζε, και, αναστηζομαι εν αυτω ελευθερος.* And Polycarp exhorts the Philippians to believe in Christ Jesus, ος ερχεται χριτης ζωντων και νεκρων· ο το αιμα εκζητησει ο θεος απο των απειθαντων αυτω. Ο δε εγειρας αυτου εκ νεκρων, και ημας εγερει, εαν ποιωμεν αυτω το θελημα, και πορευομεθα εν ταις εντολαις αυτου, και αγαπωμεν, α ηγαπησεν. From these passages it cannot be supposed that the day of judgment was apprehended by the earliest disciples, to be at hand, nor that they expected to be amongst those who should be alive and remain at the second coming of the Lord; but that they were assured they should die, and finally be raised from the grave by the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God.

* Russell's Patres Apostolici, Vol. II. p. 204.

St. Paul and the other Apostles every where exhort their brethren to make such preparations, that the second coming of the Lord from Heaven may not be attended with surprise and amazement. But, in many of the passages, in which such exhortations are given, the death only of the Christians so addressed may be signified, and not the real and immediate coming of the Lord to judgment. For, in the New Testament, the Christian is always exhorted to prepare himself, not for death, but for the coming of the Lord.—The event, therefore, of death is understood in these passages, to take place at the coming of Christ, or Christ is said to come to each individual at his own death. And, with regard to the preparations necessary to be made for an event so awfully interesting, this most assuredly is the case; for the hour of our probation terminates with the hour of our present existence, and with this hour too must terminate all preparatory repentance.—Justly, therefore, is the coming of the Lord then said to take place when we die, since, in the interval betwixt our death and resurrection, no farther preparations can be made for the last awakening summons.

But though the Apostles so constantly and so earnestly inculcated the necessity of immediate preparation for the coming of their Lord, yet does it no where appear, that they expected to survive

'till the final consummation. It is said expressly by St. Paul that the fulness of the Gentiles was to precede the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, and that the conversion of the Jews was to precede the final consummation of all things. " I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, 'till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved." It cannot be supposed that the Apostle imagined this fulness of the Gentiles and this conversion of the Jews would be effected instantaneously ; for deeply rooted prejudices against the introduction of new systems preclude the possibility of immediate change, and the establishment of a new religion is usually difficult in proportion to the attachment with which men have adhered to the old. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the Apostle, well aware of the partiality of the Jews in favour of their own rites and ceremonies, must have looked forward to their conversion through a long series of years, and consequently must have known, when he was writing his epistle to the Romans, that the final consummation was at a great distance. Having expressly said too that the time of his departure was at hand, he knew that thenceforth there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at the last day.

day. And St. Peter was fully assured, by information received from his Divine Master, that he must suffer death for the confirmation of the Gospel. Our Saviour had said to his disciples, "whither I go, ye cannot come." Peter, astonished at the impossibility of following his beloved Master, eagerly enquired, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus answered him, "whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards." The dutiful servant, in the ardour of affection, exclaimed, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." And, after his resurrection, our Lord said to the same disciple, "verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst, whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Thus was he assured that he should die, and thus in his second epistle he expressed his assurance: "I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." There is a passage too in the first epistle of St. Peter, which here demands our consideration—Παντων δε το τελος ηγγικε, the end of all things is at hand, says the Apostle. The true meaning of this passage has been misunderstood by Grotius, who has explained it as relating to

the final judgment of the world, the immediate approach of which, according to his opinion, was expected by St. Peter, as well as by St. Paul.— This mistake has evidently arisen from misconceiving the meaning of the adjective, *παντων*, which is interpreted by Grotius, and some other commentators, as relating to the final destruction of all things. But the word here understood may be the substantive, *ανθρωπων*, and the passage may relate not to the end of the world, but to the period of human life, which with great propriety is always said to be near at hand. The words, however, will, according to our translation, bear another sense, which has been admitted upon just grounds: “The end of *all things* is at hand:” For the Apostle by this expression is predicting not the end of the world, but the end of the Jewish Polity, as will appear from other texts of Scripture, where the same words occur, and have the same meaning annexed to them.— St. Mark says, “this generation shall not pass away, ’till all these things, *ταυτα παντα*, be done.”—And St. Matthew, chap. xxiv. uses the same words in the same sense. Hence we may conclude with the learned Mede that this passage in St. Peter alludes to * “the end of all the Jewish commonwealth, legal worship, temple, and service,” and not to the end of the world.

* Mede, page 664.

The immediate approach of the day of judgment cannot then be said to have been predicted by the Apostles. And that they did not expect themselves to be alive and remain 'till the last day is evident ; for St. Peter himself asserted, that his own death was not only unavoidable, but necessary to the completion of his Lord's predictions. We are informed, however, notwithstanding such evidence to the contrary, that it was foretold by the Apostles, and " that the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us " not to press too closely the mysterious language " of prophecy." Applicable, indeed, to this taunting impiety and to the author of it, are the words of St. Peter, " there shall come in the last " days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and " saying, where is the promise of his coming ?" The unbelieving Sadducee and the licentious Epicurean carried not their views beyond this mortal life to any future existence ; but doubting or denying the possibility of a resurrection, they warmly resisted the opinions of others, who endeavoured to prove its probability and its certainty. From such the religion of Christ might naturally expect the scoff of impiety, and his followers the scourge of persecution. But neither the levity of ridicule, nor the violence of oppression could cheat them of their faith, or weaken their constancy. " Since " the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as " they

“ they were from the beginning of the creation.”
 —Such is the upbraiding language of the scoffer, and such is the cry of the unbeliever. “ But beloved,” says the Apostle, as if with a view to oppose the opinion of the immediate approach of the end of the world, “ be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day ; the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Such is the argument by which the scoffer is refuted, and such is the consolatory advice, by which Christians are strengthened and supported.

That the Christian religion has provoked the malice of so many enemies, and that it has met with such violent opposition, ought not, in any great degree, to excite our wonder. The laws prescribed by it for the regulation of moral conduct are positive and explicit. They admit of no qualification, nor allow the caprice of fashion to palliate or to excuse the violation of their commands. Their influence extends not merely to the forms of outward demeanor, but to the inward and more indiscernible movements of the heart. Hence deism was roused, though in reality, perhaps, convinced of the truths of Christianity, to dispute its pretensions to divine origin, and

and to vilify its inspired teachers. And hence it was insinuated, that from the long and protracted delay of Christ's second advent, it might reasonably be concluded, that the expectation of a future judgment, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, according to the Gospel declaration, was weak and ill founded. By these means infidelity endeavoured to quiet its own fears, and to blast the pious hopes of the virtuous and the good. But the Christian religion, though attacked by the full powers of its adversaries, still maintains its preeminence, and challenges the belief of every considerate enquirer. It still proclaims the glad tidings of everlasting felicity to the righteous, and bids them look forward with the eye of faith and resignation through this vale of mifery to a happier and to a better state, where, however distant may be the prospect, every wish of their souls shall finally be gratified, and their expectations crowned with eternal glory.

But the coming of the Lord, mentioned in the passage above quoted from St. Peter, has by some been interpreted into God's visitation upon the obdurate Jews and Gnostics. This exposition however, though applicable in some cases to the destruction of Jerusalem, cannot be admitted here ; for, in the preceding verses, there is evidently a comparison drawn by the Apostle betwixt the manner in which the old world perished by
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the flood, and the manner in which the present shall be consumed by fire. " By the word of
 " God the heavens were of old, and the earth
 " standing out of the water and in the water :
 " whereby the world that then was, being over-
 " flowed with water, perished. But the heavens
 " and the earth which are now, by the same word
 " are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the
 " day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly
 " men." These words cannot possibly be understood of God's coming to destroy Jerusalem, for then St. Peter would not have mentioned any long distance of time, at which the event he foretold should take place ; for he knew, when he made use of the expression, " beloved, be not ignorant
 " of this one thing, that one day is with the
 " Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years
 " as one day," that the destruction of Jerusalem would speedily take place, which accordingly happened about four years afterwards.

It ought not to pass unobserved, that the eternity of God has been called a moment, and that this same text from St. Peter has been quoted to prove the propriety of the expression. But to suppose that the Apostles had any intentions of thus representing the eternal duration of the Deity, by such figures of speech, would be to ascribe to them a language dark and metaphysical, to which they were totally unaccustomed. The simplicity
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of the expression is obvious: that the promises of God were easily performed by him, whatever space might intervene betwixt the times when they were given and when they should be fulfilled, for to him "all times are alike, and all points of duration the same."

It must be remarked too before we dismiss the present text of Scripture, that Grotius, without the appearance of probability in favour of his opinion, has supposed this second epistle to have been improperly ascribed to St. Peter. It is introduced, as the generality of the epistles are, with the name and ministerial office of the writer:

Πέτρος ἀπὸστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; but the learned commentator supposes it to have been written by Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, and that it ought accordingly to have been prefaced with his name Συμεων ἀπὸστολος, &c. But this opinion, if confirmed, would destroy the authenticity of the writing, and take away from the credibility of its inspired author. The Apostle, says he, was put to death during the reign of Nero, before the destruction of Jerusalem; but the epistle under consideration was written after this event, it could not therefore be the composition of St. Peter. But from what evidence it appears to have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem, cannot easily be discovered. Grotius says that it was, because no Christian believed that the end of the world would

take place, before the entire subversion of the Jewish polity. Thus he insinuates that, because this signal punishment had not been inflicted upon the Jews whilst the Apostle was living, it was not probable that he would speak of what was to take place after it should have been inflicted. But probability will lead the reader to suppose that St. Peter was really the author of the epistle which bears his name, and when the necessity, by which he was induced to speak of the calamities and persecutions, which were to precede the end of the world, shall be considered, that probability will be converted into certainty. Scoffers, says he, shall come in the last times, and jeeringly interrogate you, where is the promise of his kingdom? If this was to be the case, it was highly necessary, though Jerusalem was not then destroyed, that the Apostle should arm his Christian brethren with such arguments, as might, when those times should come, refute the scoffer and silence the objector.

Having thus considered those passages in the epistles, which principally relate to the day of judgment, and having from them endeavoured to prove, that it was an event not expected by the authors of them to take place during their lives, it will be proper briefly to advert to the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of St. Matthew, in which Grotius, Dr. Clarke, and others, have
thought

thought that by the destruction of the Jewish nation, was predicted either throughout the whole of the twenty-fifth chapter, or at particular intervals, the end of the world. No passage either of sacred or prophane history has occasioned greater diversity of opinion, than the chapter in question. —Grotius divides it into three distinct parts; the first division ends, according to his partition of it, at the twenty-third verse, the second at the thirtieth, and the last concludes with the end of the chapter. The third and last division is introduced by the words, *και τοτε φανησεται το σημειον τε υιου τε ανθρωπου εν τω ερανω*,* and immediately afterwards follows the passage, *και οψονται τον υιον τε ανθρωπου ερχομενον επι των νεφελων*. These words relate to the second coming of Christ to judge the world, says Grotius, though he had said that the twenty-ninth verse could not relate to this event, because of the words with which it commences, *ευθως δε μελα την θλιψιν των ημερων εκεινων ο Ηλιος σκολισθησεται*.†

* And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man.

Then shall the Son of Man give a proof of himself, whom they would not before acknowledge; a proof indeed, not in any visible figure, but in vengeance and judgment so visible, that all the tribes of the earth shall be forced to acknowledge him the avenger.

Lightfoot. Matt. xxiv.

† For the reason why our Saviour gave his discourse upon this subject in a sublime and prophetic style, see Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, vol. I, page 75.

—But why the word, *τοτε*, in the thirtieth verse should not have equal force with the word, *ευθως*, in the twenty-ninth, cannot easily be comprehended. Besides, our Saviour would not have positively asserted that any circumstance should immediately (*τοτε*) take place, which was not to be fulfilled 'till after the expiration of so many centuries.

Again, Dr. Clarke would wish the prediction to commence at the sixth and eighth verses, and to be again renewed at the fourteenth. But this exposition, if allowed, will admit into the Holy Scriptures such confusion of symbol and fact, as must render the most obvious passages abstruse and inexplicable.

Our Saviour said expressly, verse thirty-fourth, “ this generation shall not pass away 'till all these things be fulfilled,”* and we know that St. John lived to see the overthrow and final destruction of Jerusalem. With all due deference, therefore, to the learning and abilities of these commentators, it may perhaps be more judicious, and certainly more agreeable to the simplicity of the Gospel, to confine the prediction of the day of judgment to

* This generation shall not pass 'till all these things be fulfilled.

It appears plain that the foregoing verses are not to be understood of the last judgment, but of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Lightfoot. Matt. xxiv.

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the thirty-first verse of the twenty-fifth chapter, where our Saviour begins to say, “ when the Son
 “ of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy
 “ angels with him, then shall he sit upon the
 “ throne of his glory : and before him shall be
 “ gathered all nations ; and he shall separate them
 “ one from another, as a shepherd divides his
 “ sheep from the flock ; and he shall set the sheep
 “ on his right hand, but the goats on his left.”
 —And the prediction of this great event is continued, in words too obvious to be misunderstood, to the end of the chapter, “ these shall go away
 “ into everlasting punishment, but the righteous
 “ into life eternal.”

Thus these chapters will be free from many difficulties, which may tend to confuse the reader, and rendered more consonant to the simplicity which every where characterizes the Scripture-language ; and thus too it will appear that the Apostles themselves could have no reason to assert, from the words of their Divine Master, that the day of judgment was at hand, since he here represents the complete uncertainty of the event, and only exhorts them to immediate preparation.

What has been already said upon the subject may be still farther confirmed by an appeal to the Revelations of St. John. An express prophecy will there be found of a long series of years, which were to expire before the approach of the
 day

day of judgment. Indeed the whole book of the Apocalypse contains such powerful evidence for the truths of our religion, that a due consideration of the prophecies contained in it, with the past fulfilment of some of them, and with the certainty of the future completion of the rest, cannot but confirm the Christian of the present day in his faith, and convert the unbeliever from his infidelity and error. Convinced that we have not followed cunningly devised fables, and feeling our conviction of the great truths of Christianity, we may still say with St. Peter, *εχομεν βεβαιωτερον τον προφητικον λογον*, we have a more sure word of prophecy, which, at the present crisis, when some considerable part of it seems to be awfully fulfilling on the solemn theatre of the world, must claim our notice and arrest our most serious attention.

In the Revelations, St. John particularly describes the Man of Sin, and the Antichrist, who should appear long before the consummation of all things. Nay, not only his person is signified, but the place, where he should tyrannize, and the time during which his dominion should continue. The Beast, which arose out of the sea, is represented as successor to the great red Dragon, and by this red Dragon is understood the power of heathen Rome. "The Dragon gave him (the "Beast) his power, his seat, and great authority." From this passage it appears, that the antichristian tyranny

tyranny was to commence at the end of the Roman empire; and it is afterwards predicted how long its power should continue. "Then was given to the Beast a mouth speaking great things, and blasphemies, and power was given him to continue forty and two months."*—From this single prediction of St. John it is sufficiently clear, that he did not believe the day of judgment to be at hand; but knew that a long series of years was to elapse, before the promise of Christ's second coming was to be fulfilled.

From this evidence an endeavour, however weak and feeble, has been made to prove that the Apostles, St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John, were not mistaken in their expectations of an immediate judgment, since it appears evident, from the passages above alluded to, that no such expectations were ever entertained. The Sceptic and the Infidel

* Daniel is said to prophecy of the same event in his twelfth chapter, and to allot to the power there signified the same duration—"it shall be for a time, times and a half." These numbers, says Bp. Newton, comparing the time mentioned by Daniel with that mentioned by St. John, we shall find upon computation to be the same. For a time is a year, and a time and times and the dividing of time or half a time are three years and a half, and three years and a half are forty-two months, and forty-two months are twelve hundred and sixty days, and twelve hundred and sixty days, in the prophetic style, are twelve hundred and sixty years.

Bp. Newton on the Prophecies, vol. II, page 734.

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may assert, and indeed have asserted, the contrary ; but the Christian believes in the inspiration of the Apostles, and receives, with suspicion, the bold and unjustifiable assertions of impiety and atheism. —Difficulties, it is true, occur in the Scriptures ; but such difficulties, he knows, are not peculiar to the holy writings, they occur universally in every composition. The Christian advocate is assured that the Scriptures are able to make him wise unto salvation, and such wisdom he piously seeks, as the only desirable, the only invaluable attainment. —The approach of the day of judgment is uncertain ; but with respect to this event, he feels little anxiety or solicitude. The period of his sojourning here cannot be at any great distance, and for this period immediate preparation is indispensable, that, whenever the time of his departure shall come, he may meet death without fear or amazement. He seeks not, with impertinent curiosity, to look behind the veil, and to pry into the mysteries of his God ; but, satisfied with the knowledge imparted to him, humbly endeavours, whilst it is called to day, to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, that that night may not overtake him by surprize, in which, when it cometh, no man can work. 22 JY 69

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